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## HISTORY OF BOCA RATON INLET

Boca Raton Inlet is the southernmost inlet in Palm Beach County. Originally a natural waterway, the inlet has changed locations at least three times in the past 200 years (Bream 1990). In the late 1760's, the inlet was located in the northeast corner of the present Lake Boca Raton (figure 5). By the 1800's, the inlet had closed at its northern location and reopened in the southeast corner of the lake. Both inlet locations had opened and closed constantly with drifting sands. The Mackay-Blake map of Florida published in 1840 shows that there was no inlet at Boca Raton at that time (Austin 1976). When Florida became a state in 1845, the Bruff map included no inlet at Boca Raton; historical records even as late as 1914 showed no inlet (Austin 1976).

A map from the 1740's named the inlet Rio Seco, or Dry River (Austin 1976). In a map published in 1775, surveyor Bernard Romans agreed that Rio Seco was in fact this inlet. The waterway was not called Boca Raton Inlet until after 1838. Another inlet far down the coast at the north end of Biscayne Bay was named Boca Ratones (or Boca de Ratones) according to maps by De Brahm in the 1770's. The inlet has been named by the Spaniards, not for rats as is commonly thought, but for the sharp, submerged rocks found off the Atlantic entrance to the passage (Chardon 1975). The inlet was closed by 1822 by infilling sand, and by 1838 another inlet had opened to the south. This new inlet was called Boca Ratones by some, and Narrows Cut or Norris Cut by others. According to Chardon (1975), the issue was incorrectly resolved by giving the name Boca Ratones to a third inlet much farther north in present south Palm Beach County.

Engineering drawings by the Riddle Company in 1925 placed the proposed inlet location about 800 feet north of its former location and oriented east-west, stabilized by 400 foot jetties 200 feet apart. That site was dredged in 1926 (Boca Raton Historical Society).

The War Department authorized Spanish River Land Company on September 3, 1930 "to construct jetties and revetment, dredging and filling in Boca Raton Inlet" (Boca Raton Historical Society). In 1930-31, local interests financed the construction of two parallel jetties at a cost of \$130,000 in an attempt to solve the beach erosion problem (Strock 1979). From 1940-1945 the Army Air Force dredged 14,700 cubic yards of material from the channel. In the late 1940's 11,000 cu yd of material was dredged from the inlet and placed on the south beach.

In 1947, a hurricane destroyed the north jetty permitting sand and silt to clog the inlet (Delray News-Journal 1956). In 1951, Mr. J. M. Schine, then owner of the Boca Raton Hotel, had offered to donate land to either side of the inlet if the city would agree to repair the jetties. The city had to decline the offer because of a lack of funds to repair the jetties. Local interests spent \$8,000 for repair of the damaged jetties and maintenance dredging of the inlet (Strock 1979). Repeated dredging gave only temporary relief until 1956 when new improvements were expected to remedy the situation. By then the inlet was largely blocked, making navigation hazardous and polluting the lake and the Intracoastal Waterway. In July 1956, the inlet was widened, and the inlet and Lake Boca Raton were deepened to 10 feet. Work also included rebuilding the north side of the jetty and capping the south side (Delray News-Journal 1956).



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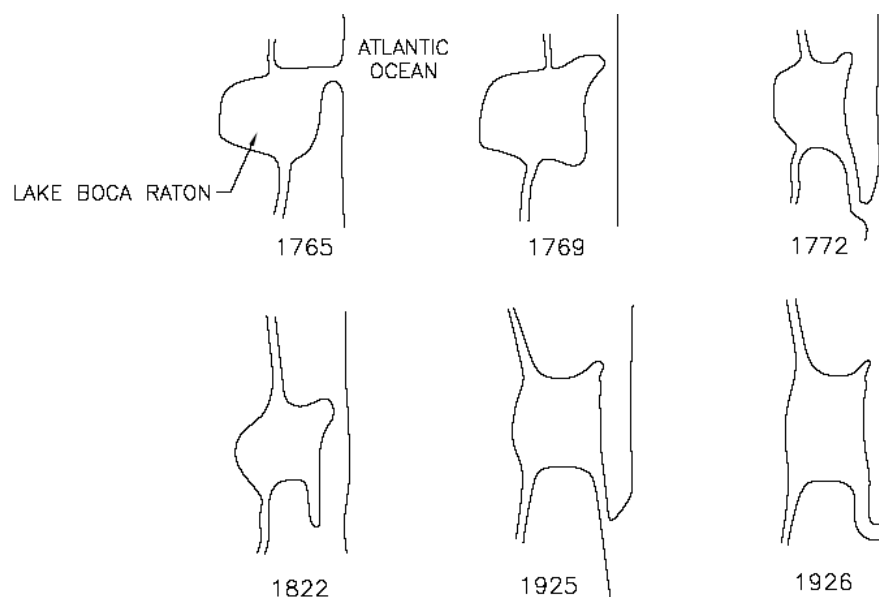


Figure 5. Migration of Boca Raton Inlet over more than 200 years (adapted from Boca Raton Historical Society Spanish River Papers, 1981).

For nearly 20 years, city agencies had come and gone, the problem of the inlet had been studied and re-studied, and part-way measures had been taken, but no solution had been found (Boca Raton News 1966). Early in 1966, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers turned down a proposal for federal funding of a sand transfer system across the inlet because "benefit would not be sufficient to justify the costs" (Boca Raton News 1966).

A northeaster plugged the inlet during the 1966 Thanksgiving weekend (Boca Raton News 1966). Wind had blown sand over the jetty from the adjoining beach, and waves were high enough to break over the jetty, carrying even more sand directly into the inlet. Sand was also carried into the mouth of the inlet from the ocean. A sand bar formed all the way across the inlet and three feet above the high tide mark (Boca Raton News 1966). Weeds and trash were backing up for hundreds of feet. All flood water had to leave the Intracoastal through Hillsboro Inlet (which was also partially closed) or South Lake Worth Inlet. Dredging operations successfully reopened the inlet sometime before Christmas that year, with a small channel three feet deep and 15-20 feet wide.

After the inlet was reopened in December 1966, another storm hit and plugged the inlet.

Following much debated over what to do, city workmen began work to reopen the inlet on February 1, 1967 (Rifenburg 1968). Water trickled through the inlet during the summer of 1967. In the winter of 1967, high winds again put a sand bar across the mouth of the passage. After the Boca Raton News reported that the stagnant waters of Lake Boca Raton were indeed polluted, the city quickly ordered the inlet opened one more time. It was not, however, dredged to depths navigable for large boats (Rifenburg 1968).

The first phase of a three phase inlet program would fund the repairs and extension of the north jetty and dredging. Eventual completion of the program would apparently remedy a situation that had been a source of irritation for citizens, developers, and city officials for many years (Rifenburg 1968).

In April 1969, Arvida Corporation dredged the inlet open. It took 11 days to complete the 150 feet wide channel. Again, in February 1970, Arvida dredged the inlet; but this time, because of stormy weather, it took seven weeks to dig a channel 75 feet wide and six feet deep (Arvida 1970).

In 1972, the inlet, its jetties, and maintenance access easements were deeded to the City of Boca Raton with the stipulation that the inlet be kept navigable (Strock 1979). The city purchased an 8-inch hydraulic pipeline dredge to maintain the inlet and transfer beach material to the beach south of the inlet.

The Boca Raton Inlet Tax District was authorized in a bill passed by the Florida State Legislature April 20, 1972 and was submitted for approval by the people in a referendum July 18, 1972. The purpose was to have a body set up by law responsible to the public and with powers and duties clearly defined concerning inlet maintenance (Gallagher 1972). The bill was voted down.

In November 1972, the City purchased its own dredge for \$112,000. The City also signed an agreement with Arvida, which owned the beach north and south of the inlet. The developer

agreed to pay \$10,000 per year until 1983 to have the inlet dredged (Rogers 1978). Since regular



maintenance dredging began in 1972, the inlet has remained open (Morrissey 1992). In 1975, the north jetty was extended 180 feet seaward and the south jetty was reinforced; flanking of the south jetty began, the horseshoe bar was eliminated, and shoaling in the inlet was reduced (figure 6). In 1977 and 1978, the city spent \$71,300 to dredge the waterway (Rogers 1978). In 1980, a weir section 65 feet long was constructed in the north jetty to allow a portion of the sand accreting on the north beach to be transported south. The south jetty was extended landward to prevent flanking. Dredging operations placed 297,000 cubic yards of material on the south beach in 1985. Most of the sand was taken from the ebb shoal. Today the entrance channel is approximately 150 feet wide and 10 feet deep. The north jetty is 650 feet long with a 65 foot weir section two-thirds of the way seaward. The south jetty is 800 feet long. The City of Boca Raton operates a dredge to bypass material from inside the inlet to the south beach. The City has transferred an average of 55,000 cubic yards of material per year to the downdrift beaches since 1980.



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